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ETHICS¹

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Ethics is the science that deals with conduct in so far as this is considered right or wrong. If conduct is regulated simply by the measure of customs or usages, this is not carrying it into the realm of ethics. Conduct must be the outcome of choice and purpose; choice should be affected by the rights of others, and purpose should be based upon the individual's ability to judge of the choice as right or wrong measured by this standard. The function of ethics is to secure correct outward action based upon an inner life whose activities all spring from a principle of living, or perhaps it may be better said, to arise from living by principle. Character is or should be the ultimate end of all social activity, but because social institutions are more or less imperfect, the character produced by them is fragmentary and inconsistent. The social organism lacks ethical unity which is due to the fact that society is not permeated by a recognized common ideal nor will society ever possess this ethical unity until it bases all its institutions upon the principles of living as taught us by the great Master whose teachings are the essence of ethics.

Every legitimate field of activity open to man, let it be commercial, industrial, political, professional, or what not, must have an underlying method of procedure adapted to its requirements: but when man enters this or that field he carries with him, beside his special preparation for the activities of the field of his selection, his own ideals or lack of ideals; the grouping of individuals in any given field creates the necessity for harmony in purpose and ideals. Those activities having merely to do with the outward manners or ways may be classed as customs, usages, or the amenities of life, but when actions affect the rights of others, then we perceive the ethical aspects.

One of the most puzzling questions of life is, "What is right, what is wrong?"

When one pauses to consider the teachings as found in the Bible, he cannot but be impressed by the absence of specific, detailed instruction on conduct, excepting in matters pertaining to the material life. We are commanded not to kill, not to steal, not to covet, and so on, but for the effects of the countless influences that go to make the structure known as the inner life, our conceptions of our relation to our fellow

¹ Read at the meeting of the New York State Nurses' Association, October, 1915.

men, the shaping of one's thoughts and feelings, the understanding necessary to cope with life's temptations and problems, we are given broad, underlying principles upon which to determine the outward manifestations of that inner life, rather than the specific "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not."

Upon purity of heart is based purity of living; through the great gift of that love that passeth understanding, is secured a regard for the rights of others; and from faith, hope and charity as principles of action, spring those ideals of living which mean uplift.

The leaders in commerce and industry will think mainly of competence or wealth and the politician will transact national business with a view to material conditions rather than to the moral development of his fellow countrymen, still if all are true patriots, each class will study the type of men they bring forward through their power and influence with a view to producing harmony and ethical conditions.

During the month of August last, there was held in Salt Lake City a celebration to commemorate the completion of the twenty-five years work of the "Uniform Laws Commission." The purpose of the work of this Commission had been not to make more laws, but to secure greater uniformity in the existing laws.

What has been accomplished by it? To answer briefly, advance has been made in the establishment of codes of ethics which promote a betterment in interstate as well as local transactions. Greater purity of food, more correct standards for weights and measures, drug regulations are some of the things accomplished. What created the necessity of such a commission but the lack of ideals, and what better name than ethics can we give to its successes which are based on the introduction and adoption by men of ideals that secure moral uplift?

No attempt has been made by this Commission to compel all the states to blindly accept an arbitrary regulation of certain laws, but when individual states are brought to see how ineffectual the efforts of any one state are in controlling irregularities in its drug, food or any other trade and discovers that evil disposed dealers can step over the border into a neighboring state and *legally* (?) commit the very offense the first state is endeavoring to make impossible, the argument for the establishment of action based upon higher ideals is very easily understood. The work of this Commission has been nothing more or less than the development of "codes of ethics" to regulate the operation of existing laws thereby encouraging uprightness and discouraging evil.

As we are gathered here to-day to consider nursing affairs, the natural trend of this paper should be *nursing* ethics. Without doubt, no one who sits before me today is unacquainted with Isabel Hampton

Robb's *Nursing Ethics* and it seems almost like presumption to endeavor to discuss a subject so wonderfully developed as this one has been in this book. You will recall that Mrs. Robb must have written her book about the year 1900, a fact which only increases its value. We find her saying, "We (nurses) cannot stand still in the future, the public, both medical men and the laity, will be ever demanding a still more efficient nursing, more uniformity, and a higher order of women to meet these requirements." Greatly is it to be regretted that Mrs. Robb was not permitted to live to see, even in the fifteen years since she uttered these words, to what an extent her prophecy has been fulfilled. But, granting that much has been accomplished, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that this fulfillment is far short of what it should and might be.

What are the underlying causes for a failure to have come into our own?

First, quite the same thing that was noted as the cause of failure in society generally will apply here, namely "a lack of definite ideals that permeate the whole structure." If this be true, why is there such a lack? Simple because the spirit of uniformity in purpose, as also in ideals, is absent to too great a degree.

The history of the origin and development of the training schools for nurses, as we find them today, supplies us with much necessary ground work for the discussion of the present status of the nursing profession as related to ethical accomplishments and what may be hoped for in the future. Owing to the unspeakable conditions existing in the wards of our hospitals and the entire absence of any source from which nursing as a factor in the conservation of public health could be drawn, a demand arose that such a need should be met, with the result that in connection with hospitals schools of nursing were created and rapidly became an essential in the hospital formation. Unfortunately for the future of these schools, the public was entirely unprepared to comprehend the place of the hospital in the economic values of the community and a lack of money has always been a feature in its management. Indeed, this has been regarded more or less as a virtue peculiar to the hospital. A prominent man in hospital life, one who for years was superintendent of one of the foremost hospitals of another state, once said in my hearing, "There is something wrong with a hospital that is not in debt." Speaking solely from the administrative aspect, possibly this is quite true; it also being true that this condition has been an element that has militated against the best development of schools of nursing. Far be it from any of us to decry the value of the hospital in any respect, much less when it is regarded

as a factor in nurse training, but is it altogether fair to demand or expect a fitness on the part of the nursing body at large to develop a perfect code of ethics when the system under which its members procure their nursing experience has so many ethical shortcomings?

It is quite true that great gains have been made in many respects and are still being made, but could there somehow be injected into the whole question of nurse education, a more coöperative spirit between hospital and nursing representatives, broader ethics in all the affairs of the development of nursing as connected with the hospital, and a disposition to hold the hospital, as well as the nurse, up to its obligations, unquestionably far greater would be the realization of our aims, namely: the standardization of nursing, and the nurse possessed of standards. Not while the school of nursing has its origin purely in the need of the hospital's obligation to provide a correct nursing care for its patients, will our profession "be permeated by a common ideal."

Codes of ethics never have and never will be developed from necessities met in the easiest and cheapest way. It is only when necessities are dignified by their use as factors in the education and uplift of those who serve that they play other than the part of the taskmaster. There are, however, signs that make for encouragement while also there are those that should cause us to pause and question. Notwithstanding the lack of uniformity in ideals for the education of the nurse in the minds of the public and those interested in hospitals medically, or from the financial and humanitarian standpoint, the nursing profession must not excuse itself from its obligations nor fail to take stock of its failures as well as its successes.

In the early days of the nursing organizations not infrequently was the question of discipline and punishment of offenders in the schools of nursing discussed. Why is so little heard upon these subjects today? Is it not possible that codes of ethics are in progress of development? May it not be true, at least in part, that the time has arrived when conduct and character, rather than rules and blind obedience to the same, are determining the personnel of many schools of nursing? Is it allowing optimism too large a sway when we permit ourselves to believe this?

Little dispute is feared when the statement is made that perhaps our greatest handicap in attaining the best standard is the pressure under which many schools labor in order to keep up quantity rather than quality in their personnel. When the time arrives that our schools of nursing are free from such pressure, then we may hope to see them composed of women who consider (to quote from *Nursing Ethics*),

the nurse's work a ministry. It should represent a consecrated service, performed in the spirit of Christ, who made himself of no account, but went about doing good. The woman who fails to bring this spirit into her nursing service misses the pearl of greatest value that is to be found in it. Nor do such materialists injure themselves alone, for they are the ones who bring upon our profession the criticism, so often heard, that the life is apt to make a woman hard, cold and mercenary. The scientific and educational side is important and should certainly receive its due consideration, but none the less should each nurse see to it that the spirit of love for the work's sake is fostered and developed, in order that we may have a professional code of ethics of an eminently practical and helpful nature. Such, then, are some of the responsibilities and privileges that each graduate assumes. A proper conception of our work carries with it the obligation that each individual nurse, by her actions and by her personal character, should do her part to maintain its dignity untarnished. To bring to it any less than the very best that is in us will cause it to sink in the eyes of the public and bring discredit both upon it and us. Nothing less than this individual high standard and interest will suffice, if we, as trained nurses, hope to finally evolve an organization worthy in all respects to be ranked as a profession.

The inspiration of those words written by Mrs. Robb cannot fail to touch every mind.

We should, however, by no means withhold any possible effort toward securing a code of ethics until we can make our selections as indicated. Too much of opportunity already lies within our power to permit us to hold any but a spirit of hopefulness and effort and employ such factors as can be commanded in securing better and better ideals in the nursing profession.

There are some features in the development of nursing that should be reviewed in a spirit of earnest seeking after light. First, Why is it true that so large a percentage of graduate nurses are reluctant to advocate a nurse training for sister or friend?

Second, Why should we hospital workers find it necessary to contend for the observance of our methods and conditions with the graduate nurse when she comes to us to do special duty?

Third, Why should the work of a special instructor in a school of nursing be set aside by the graduate head nurse?

What but confusion and loss can be expected when, following the work of the expert instructor in the admirably-equipped demonstration room, the probationer finds no coöperation existing between the two classes of instructors? I take the ground that the head nurse in a hospital is an instructor. Is there not a crying need of a code of ethics that will cause the work on the ward to be coöperative with the theoretical teaching?

Fourth, If the whole question of the uniform of the nurse is one surrounded by entirely good reasons for regarding it so peculiarly a

feature in nursing life, why do we find so determined a spirit on the part of some, even many, graduate nurses to degrade it? I refer to wearing it on the street and in places where no nursing use is connected with it, the use of jewelry lace, embroidery, and the resorting to extremes in cuts and materials. The abolition of the allowance to the nurse in training and the supplying of the uniform by the schools would seem to be one step towards securing, in a measure, a better ethical attitude in the matter of the uniform.

Fifth, Why, in all too many instances, is the completion of the term of nurse training regarded as a release, also, why is there found an underlying spirit of resentment toward the regulations under which the nurse has spent the three years? Is the system of nurse training as now known producing nurses of qualities rather than nurses of character? Are we requiring attention to technique and methods far beyond what is reasonable? If all methods and conditions as employed are needful then why are so many nurses going out from these schools so gravely lacking in an ethical nursing sense?

To answer these questions satisfactorily demands a far wiser head than mine, but I trust the raising them before you today may play some part in suggestion, and the spurring to increased effort toward the accomplishment of what all who possess the true nursing spirit have struggled so hard to secure.

I will venture, however, to assert that the lack of unity in purpose and ideals, which is largely due to the absence of recognized common nursing ideals, constitutes the fundamental cause for what has not yet been accomplished in the development of a code of *nursing* ethics.

THE DUTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A NURSE IN A COLLEGE INFIRMARY¹

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To all persons who work among young people, who daily touch lives that are impressionable, is accorded a great privilege. Whatever reforms we advocate, whatever ideals we hold, can only be put into successful operation, by inculcating them into the hearts of the young people of our land. The people who own fine horses in Kentucky recognize this principle; they take a fine colt while it is very young and begin in many ways to train it for its special place. So

¹ Read at the fifth annual meeting of the Mississippi State Association of Graduate Nurses, October 30, 1915.